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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003790

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DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM, INR/B  
STATE PASS USAID FOR ASIA/SCAA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: POSITIVE SHAKEUP IN KHOST AFTER PROVINCIAL LEADERS  
RELIEVED FOR ALLEGED CORRUPTION

Classified By: Interagency Provincial Affairs Deputy Director Hoyt Yee  
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In his first two months in office, acting Governor of Khost Province Tahir Khan Sabari has performed well, successfully restoring a baseline level of government in Khost and taking an active role in public outreach. The former Deputy Governor, Sabari took over from the ineffective and allegedly corrupt Hamidullah Qalandarzai in late September after Qalandarzi and Provincial Afghan National Police (ANP) Chief Abdul Qyoun Bakizoi were both removed from their posts. While not the most modern or skilled administrator, Sabari has deep local knowledge, is generally respected in Khost, and, most significantly, is not believed to be corrupt. His defusing of several recent incidents involving Coalition Forces in Khost has been helpful to us. The Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) is taking advantage of Sabari's abilities to push through stalled projects and institutionalize more regular communication than we had with the previous governor. END SUMMARY.

OUT WITH THE OLD  
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¶2. (C) Former Governor Qalandarzai's dismissal followed complaints by tribal councils and civil society groups that he was ineffective, corrupt, and risk-averse. Throughout September 2009, civil society organizations and tribal councils agitated for his removal. Qalandarzai, a Jalalabad-born technocrat appointed in January 2009 as part of a slate of young Pashtun governors charged with getting out the vote for Karzai, is a civil engineer by training and a former Deputy Minister of Communications for Administration. He made no secret of his distaste for Khost. Despite strong potential, he never seemed to fully engage with the job. Given multiple assassination attempts on previous Khost Governor Arsala Jamal and complex suicide attacks on provincial government facilities in May and July 2009, Qalandarzai was focused on his own survival rather than actively governing. A common complaint among Khostis was that he never left the Governor's House to meet with people, and never traveled to remote districts of the province. Activists also accused him of accepting bribes related to land distribution and installing relatives in key posts (e.g. Customs Director and Khost TV Director).

¶3. (SBU) Qalandarzai claimed the main reason for the popular dissatisfaction with his tenure was the dissipation of the stream of large U.S.-funded development projects in the province in recent months. (Note: It is true that the Khost PRT is reviewing Commander's Emergency Response Projects (CERP) proposals more rigorously and steering away from some with technically demanding requirements and long-term sustainment requirements. End note.) In particular, Khost residents blamed Qalandarzai for the loss of a much publicized proposal to construct a new airport for the province. (Note: the airport construction project was

determined by Combined Joint Task Force to be beyond the PRT's capacity and mission. End note.)

¶4. (C) While the drumbeat of dissatisfaction with Qalandarzai had been building for weeks, ANP Chief Qyoum's departure came more suddenly. Qyoum was considered to be a strong, operationally effective leader, but he reportedly paid \$50,000 for his job and was allegedly actively trying to recoup his investment by skimming from fuel budgets and patrolmen's salaries. According to ANP sources, Qyoum was slated to be moved to Ghazni. (Note: Ghazni Governor Usmani told us that he formally lodged his disagreement over the possible placement of Qyoum as ANP Police Chief in Ghazni with the Deputy Interior Minister Mangal. As of mid-November, Qyoum had yet to be re-assigned. End Note.)

AND IN WITH THE NEW  
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¶5. (SBU) Acting Governor Sabari, a Khost native and former Director of Tribal Affairs, has been active in the Khost provincial government for years. Born in 1950 (but looking older, with a long white beard and weathered face), he holds a B.A. in Law from Khost University. He is a member of the Sabari tribe (Sabari District is currently the most dangerous in Khost), and spent time as a mujahid during the Soviet occupation. While pro-government, Sabari has sometimes been reluctant to clearly condemn insurgent activity, and is believed to have some associations with anti-government elements. He is married, with two sons and six daughters, and does not speak English. His son Arifullah Pashtun was the top finisher in the recent Provincial Council elections,

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garnering 15% of the vote.

¶6. (SBU) In his time in office, acting Governor Sabari has restored a baseline level of government in Khost. Unlike previous Governor Qalandarzai, who rarely left his home, Sabari spends each day at the Governor's Office meeting with residents and government officials. He chairs weekly security meetings and bi-weekly administrative meetings, and hosts monthly Provincial Development Committee meetings (which are chaired by the Director of Economy per national policy). He has called district governors in for meetings on several occasions. He has taken an active role in public outreach, conducting regular TV and radio interviews on governance, development, and election security. He has re-opened, to popular acclaim, a key road near the Governor's House which had previously been closed for security reasons.

¶7. (C) Sabari has also effectively dealt with several challenges involving Coalition Forces (CF) during his first weeks in office. He was instrumental in limiting fallout from an incident in which CF mistakenly engaged an illegal Mangal fighting position on a mountain top in Nadir Shah Kot District, facilitating a meeting between key Mangal elders and Coalition representatives to address the incident. On another occasion, Sabari responded quickly and effectively to student protests over an alleged incident of Koran desecration by CF, personally persuading student leaders at Khost's Sheikh Zayed University not to expand their demonstration. In another example, on November 3, a convoy of residents from eastern Khost approached Khost City to protest a Coalition operation. Sabari defused the confrontation by inviting fifteen of the protesters, representatives to come to the Governors' office to share their concerns over tea. These instinctive, high-touch conflict resolution methods demonstrate a deep understanding of Khost's culture, and diverge significantly from what many in Khost characterized as Governor Qalandarzai's disengaged approach.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Sabari has made no secret of his desire to stay in the governor's job and expects to stay at least until a new cabinet is named. He has demonstrated more ability and

appetite to carry out the basic functions of the job than did his predecessor. Sabari has told PRT and U.S. maneuver forces that he believes he is well-qualified, but that he does not have the \$200,000-300,000 for a bribe he claims is required for the position. While he does not have a strong technical or administrative background, Sabari is a skilled tribal negotiator and seems to genuinely want to work to improve governance and provide services to the people of Khost. Working with him has been a refreshing change. We will take advantage of his time as acting governor to try to push through settlement of some land disputes which have been affecting PRT projects, and to institutionalize more regular communication than we had with the previous governor. END COMMENT.  
Mussomeli